

# Re:View

Keeping excellence in your sights | June 2014 | Issue 18



ABDO College out and about

Gillian Smith interview

Pete Williamson's journey into  
the world of optics

# Out and about and interactive



Since the last issue of *Re:View* we've been out and about and interactive.

During the spring ABDO College exhibited at both Optrafair London and the ABDO conference in Kenilworth where, as you can see from the front cover, ABDO President Peter Black and Vice President Kevin Gutsell were pictured visiting the ABDO College Bookshop stand.

On 30 April, ABDO College, in conjunction with PPG Industries, presented a webinar entitled '*Harder, stronger, clearer*', which was broadcast live from ABDO College in Godmersham,

reaching more than 250 opticians.

The CET approved webinar presented new technologies and advancements in spectacle lens materials with a focus on increasing patients comfort by understanding and embracing the advantages of new lens materials. It was presented collaboratively by Kevin Gutsell, Dora Plisic, PPG trade manager, optical materials, and Keith Cross, PPG Rx technology director, optical materials, and included a live question and answer session with more than 40 questions submitted online. The video replay of the event can be accessed via the ABDO College website.

In this issue of *Re:View*, there's a photo-feature outlining some of our recent activities, you can also read about Fran Garrett, Peter Williamson and Gillian Smith, as well as Jane Austen's impressions of Godmersham.

Finally a timely reminder, to readers who are considering taking on a student DO or those wishing to gain a professional qualification in ophthalmic dispensing, that the next first year intake will be in September, so now's the time to consider enrolment.

**Huntly Taylor FBDO, Chairman,  
ABDO College Board of Trustees**



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# Fran Garratt talks about the first six months of her course

If you are considering starting the Foundation Degree and want an insight into what it is like, or want to encourage a member of staff at your practice to do the course, read on. Fran Garratt from Gloucester is in her first year at ABDO College, studying for the Foundation Degree in Ophthalmic Dispensing, and here she talks about how she has found the first six months.

Fran's interest in optics stems from her own experiences. She says, "I was a regular patient at a multiple. I had my eyes tested there and was a contact lens wearer too. I suffered from dry eye, and had to see an ophthalmologist, and the whole experience sparked my interest in optics. I applied for a job as a customer service assistant and worked in that practice for two years. I decided I wanted to improve my skills and study for the FBDO qualification and get a degree. That practice couldn't offer me what I needed so I applied for a job at an independent in Gloucester who could. I began work there last September, just as my degree course started."

For Fran, getting a degree as well as the FBDO qualification was key to choosing the course at ABDO College. She says, "I like seeing people happy with their new specs, and the FBDO and degree combination is ideal for me. Getting a degree gives me more mobility beyond just having the FBDO qualification." Like many students, Fran has worked for a number of years before joining the course. Talking about the transition back to study, she says, "The first few months have been hard work,

but really good. It's been six years since I last did an exam, and longer for others on the course, so that's been tough, especially as we have to combine studying and working. The support around me has helped me get through, especially the backup from those I go to uni with. We support each other via texts and on Facebook. We talk too sometimes, but very little as time is an issue for everyone."

Returning to study comes with plenty of challenges. Fran says, "After the first block I felt a little bit intimidated, and I was not sure whether I would make it through the course. I was at the second block last week, and the penny dropped. Everything fell into place, and I felt, 'This is why I'm doing it'. It can be the simplest thing, but when in practice a patient asks you a question and you can answer it, it is really satisfying.

I found optics hard and I struggled with it at first. Ophthalmic lenses is slightly easier because I can visualise what I'm talking about from my experience in practice."

Fran particularly enjoys elements of the course that come because she is studying for the Foundation Degree.

She explains, "You study communication in depth as part of the degree which has made me look at how we behave in practice in a more critical way. We did an assignment on rapport which has made me be more analytical about who is good with patients, how they respond to them and why it helps. It's the degree that really emphasises the communication side. It makes you more self-aware and helps you think about how your behaviour influences people." Because of this part of the course, Fran has thought further about communication in optics. She says, "There isn't enough publicity for optics on TV, and I'd like to see more done about that. Moving on, I'd love to look more closely at promoting eye care, perhaps for a dissertation or further degree. We need more celebrities associated with eye health. I'd like to see 'look after your eyes' to be promoted by public figures in the same way that Jamie Oliver is associated with healthy eating. The government needs the same sort of commitment to eye care as they have to 'stop smoking' messages."

So what's next for Fran? She says, "The coursework with weekly assignments finishes in May and we have end of year exams in June in ophthalmic lenses and optics, plus practical exams. After that I'll go onto the second year. I've had my moments of doubt about whether I could complete the course but with the support of others, I now feel that I can do it. In the long term I want to stay in practice. I'd quite like to be a contact lens optician, because that is where my interest started, and I also want to learn about low vision."

# Where Jane Austen wrote

## The novelist was a regular visitor to Godmersham

If you have studied at Godmersham, home of ABDO College, have you found the beautiful house and grounds an inspiring place to study? If so, you are in excellent company.

In the early nineteenth century Jane Austen was a regular visitor to Godmersham, then home to her brother Edward and his family. Edward had inherited Godmersham from Thomas Knight, and his sisters visited regularly. These visits often lasted several months, during which Jane wrote letters describing shopping in Canterbury as well as the day to day life in the great house, and wrote parts of her novels.

Jane continued to work on several of her novels while staying at Godmersham. She drew on her experiences in Kent for her descriptions of her fictional grand houses, perhaps inspired by the view of deer feeding on the green slopes surrounding the house, by parties and quiet evenings after dinner, playing charades, reading, listening to music and talking with her family.

Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* is said to depict characters and scenes from the village – and it has also been suggested that the house was the basis for Rosings, the home of Lady Catherine De Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*. Visits to local friends and society occasions in the area all provided fuel for Jane Austen's imagination.

She writes of life at Godmersham, "We live in the Library except at Meals & have a fire every Evening ... I am now

alone in the Library, Mistress of all I survey – at least I may say so & repeat the whole poem if I like it, without offence to anybody ... At this present time I have five Tables, Eight and twenty chairs & two fires all to myself ... Yesterday passed quite à la Godmersham ... James and Mary are much struck with the beauty of the place ... The Comfort of the Billiard Table here is very great – It draws all the Gentlemen to it whenever they are within, especially after Dinner, so that my Ni Fanny & I have the Library to ourselves in delightful quiet ... Half an hour before breakfast – (very snug, in my own room, lovely morng, excellent

fire, fancy me) ... In another week I shall be at home – & then, my having been at Godmersham will seem like a Dream ... But in the meantime for Elegance & Ease & Luxury."

Jane's sister in law, Elizabeth died in 1808, leaving Edward with eleven children, from fifteen year old Fanny to the baby Brook, so his sister's visits were particularly welcome. Jane developed a particular fondness for Edward's daughter Fanny who she wrote to regularly. Some of these letters are displayed at The Godmersham Park Heritage Centre (see Resources).

Jane made up verses and told stories to her nieces and nephews too: "She was the one to whom we always looked for help," writes a niece. "She could make everything amusing to a child . . . . She would tell us the most delightful stories, chiefly of Fairyland, and her fairies all had characters of their own. The tale was invented, I am sure, at the moment



Jane's writing desk and spectacles

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and was continued for two or three days if occasion required – being begged for on all possible and impossible occasions.”

Another niece, Marianne Knight, recalled, “I remember that when Aunt Jane came to us at Godmersham she used to bring the MS of whatever novel she was writing with her, and would shut herself up with my elder sisters in one of the bedrooms to read them aloud. I and the younger ones used to hear peals of laughter through the door, and thought it very hard that we should

but perhaps not surprising given that her narratives revolve around the setting; the interior and exterior of houses as well as women. The architecture of Godmersham seems to typify the solidity, symmetry, order and longevity that Austen’s work valorises; values upon which all happy endings are built. So, when you are studying optics or ophthalmic lenses, writing an essay or doing careful calculations, think of Jane Austen, sitting writing in the very same building, two hundred years ago.

‘In another week I shall be at home – & then, my having been at Godmersham will seem like a Dream ... But in the meantime for Elegance & Ease & Luxury.’

be shut out from what was so delightful. I also remember how Aunt Jane would sit quietly working beside the fire in the library, saying nothing for a good while, and then would suddenly burst out laughing, jump up and run across the room to a table where pens and paper were lying, write something down, and then come back to the fire and go on quietly working as before.”

Buildings are very significant in Jane Austen’s work. The grand estates epitomise the social stratification of the day but the neo-classical architecture of the period and the books also signify values and ideals which resonate in Austen’s work. It can be easy to forget how instructive and influential architecture is. It’s certainly fascinating that architecture and literature has this aesthetic synergy

### Resources

Visit the Heritage Centre which opens on the first Monday of the month or by appointment:

<http://godmershamheritage.webs.com/>

Elizabeth and Edward Austen Knight are commemorated in the church of St Lawrence the Martyr at Godmersham, on a large memorial on the wall of the nave and also in a stained glass window in the chancel. There is also a memorial to Thomas and Catherine Knight, Edward’s adoptive parents. Find out more about Jane Austen at the site of the Jane Austen Society

<http://www.janeaustensoci.freeuk.com/>

Read more about where she lived in *Jane Austen: Her Homes & Her Friends* (John Lane The Bodley Head, 1923) by Constance Hill.

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For further information on ABDO College sponsorship opportunities contact Michael R Potter FBDO on 01227 733 913 or email at [mpotter@abdo.org.uk](mailto:mpotter@abdo.org.uk).



## ABDO College out and about

Spring 2014 was a busy period with ABDO College staff 'out and about' both attending and hosting a number of events.

Firstly, the College participated at the 2014 ABDO Conference and Exhibition held 30 & 31 March at Chesford Grange, Kenilworth. Just two weeks later the College team attended Optrafair London, which was held 11 to 13 April at Olympia London.

In addition, the College hosted tutor workshops in Kenilworth, London and Manchester during April.

The College exhibition stands at both the ABDO conference and Optrafair London attracted a good number of visitors. There was considerable interest in the new ABDO College publications and the ophthalmic dispensing courses. The tutor workshops provided a valuable opportunity to inform tutors on the latest developments, to highlight the College's requirements and to receive tutors' feedback.



# Pete Williamson explains his journey into the world of optics

Pete Williamson is the dispensing optician at the Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre, and has recently completed his degree in Optical Dispensing Studies (ODS) with ABDO College and Canterbury Christ Church University. Here he explains his journey into the world of optics.

Pete says, "I worked in retail for around eighteen months after leaving university. Then I saw an advert for an optical assistant with Dollond and Aitchison in 2005 in Chester. I really enjoyed it and the company had a scheme whereby it offered to sponsor students to take an ophthalmic dispensing course with ABDO College. I applied, was successful and took it from there." Pete found that his training as an optical assistant stood him in good stead when he started the Fellowship Dispensing Diploma course. He says, "I asked the dispensing optician lots of questions and the in-house training team had helped me build up some knowledge as an OA. The course took it to the next level."

Continuing onto the degree course was a straightforward choice for Pete. He says, "I did the diploma first, and then went on to do the degree top-up as part of the first cohort to go through the ODS course. Having the opportunity to do a degree was something I really wanted to do."

Progressing onto degree level study came with its own challenges, though. Pete says, "The diploma course didn't involve essays so moving onto the degree was a step up, and I needed to develop an academic style of writing. Reading articles that had been written



Pete Williamson

academically helped, and one of the lecturers guided us through how to do it. My wife was doing her degree in nursing at the same time and we helped each other too. With the diploma you have more supervision and work to hand in each week, but the degree course gives you longer timespans, such as work that is due in six months,

which was also a challenge. It was intense doing the degree last year – I was getting married in August and training for an Ironman Triathlon in the same month so I was under pressure to complete the degree work too. It really tested my time management skills."

Pete is finding his studies come into use every day in his work at the Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre. He says, "I've been there for two and a half years and every day brings a fresh challenge. I get to dispense all the things you're taught about and think you'll never use again, such as complex prescriptions. You need to really visualise what the prescription will look like if it is over +/-10D. The degree course really helped me think more about the implications of prescribing. I did my final module on the psychological impact of glasses wear on young children, looking at whether glasses provide a link to bullying and it's made me think more about that. My investigation showed that glasses weren't a direct cause, but they can make a child stand out and looking different can cause bullying. Now, I make sure that children pick frames that they like. Children are more accepting of wearing glasses and styles have moved on a lot too."

Working in a hospital, Pete tends to see more high prescriptions than in

**'Working at the Centre gives me fresh challenges daily, and keeps my skills up to scratch!'**

# An interview with Gillian Smith

## Senior Lecturer, ABDO College

high street practice. He says, "At the hospital we get such a varied range of prescriptions, from the low end up to the highly complex. Hypermetropic patients tend to benefit from blended lenticular lenses, whereas for high myopes it is about changing the index of the lenses and the right kind of frames. I like to keep children in full aperture lenses but it doesn't always work. I'm now on first name terms with most of the Norville technical department. The biggest challenge was a 22D cyl which couldn't be made: I talked to the optometrist and we modified the prescription, as it was a backup to the patient's contact lenses, so we came up with a compromise that helped her vision and could also be dispensed."

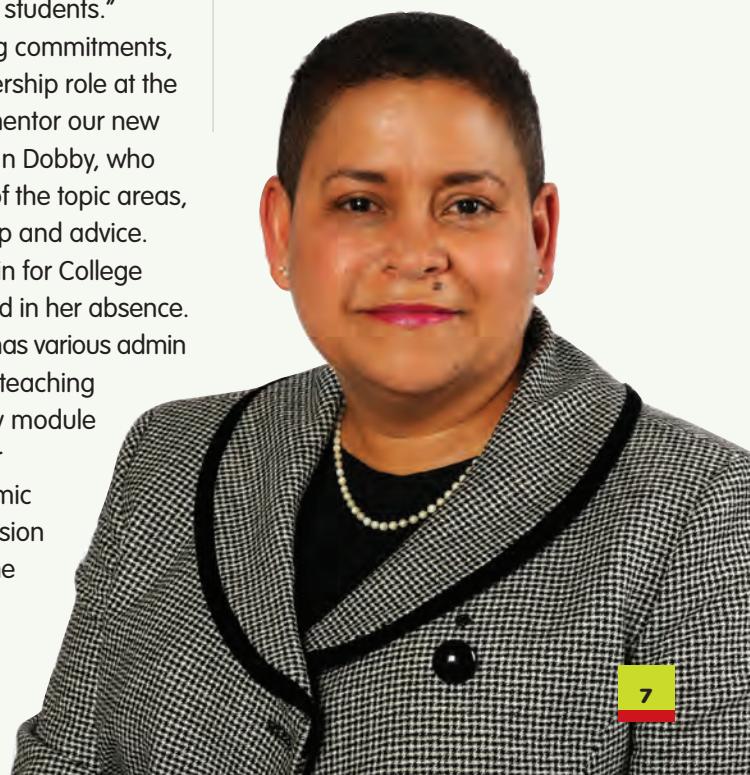
Pete Williamson sums up his career in optics. He says, "It is much more rewarding than I thought it would be: you get people who come in who tell you that it is great that they finally have a pair of glasses that they can see through. With young children, you can see them smile as they put their new glasses on, and in some cases see the world clearly for the first time in their lives. Working at the hospital gives me fresh challenges daily, and keeps my skills up to scratch!" Pete isn't stopping at the degree, however. He explains. "I've been debating whether to move on to do the low vision course with ABDO College as there are plenty of low vision clinics at the Birmingham Midland Eye Centre. I'm also considering doing a post graduate masters at some point in the future. I'm still keen to learn new things."

Gillian Smith BSc(Hons) FBDO (Hons) SLD (Hons) LVA Cert Ed is Senior Lecturer at ABDO College, Godmersham in Kent. As part of the series of interviews with key members in the ABDO College and Canterbury Christ Church University team, read on to find out more about Gillian and her interests which extend beyond optics to French and tennis coaching.

"I teach everything except contact lenses," Gillian explains. "When we set up ABDO College in 2001 I wrote most of the hand-outs, lectures, exercises and labs for first year optics, second year anatomy and optics and third year visual optics (now refractive management), as well as courses including low vision. Thirteen years on, I am still involved with most of these courses which means lots of updates. I teach theory and practical subjects to our degree, diploma and low vision honours block release students."

Alongside her lecturing commitments, Gillian has a key leadership role at the College. She says, "I mentor our new member of staff, Haydn Dobby, who teaches across most of the topic areas, providing him with help and advice. Alongside this I stand in for College Principal Jo Underwood in her absence. Every member of staff has various admin duties as well as their teaching timetable. I'm currently module leader for second year anatomy and ophthalmic dispensing, and low vision in both semesters for the degree course."

Beyond her College commitments Gillian still practices, but only occasionally, because she has limited time. As a principle examiner for the ABDO FQE Advanced Theory of Ophthalmic Lenses and Dispensing Theory paper, she says, "I need to keep my hand in, to see what is current in practice in terms of lenses and frames, and I really enjoy the chance to interact with patients. After a day in practice I think, 'Why don't I do more of this?' but I get back to College and realise that it's teaching that



gives me the biggest buzz. I consider myself really fortunate to be able to get up in the morning and actually look forward to going to work."

Like many people, Gillian says, "I fell into optics! When I finished my A Levels I didn't know what to do. I had been offered a place to do a zoology degree at Chelsea College, London, but I had no idea what I would be able to do with it except teach – and I was never going to be a teacher! As I didn't get the grades predicted, due to too much tennis and too little revision, I thought I'd take a year out to earn some money whilst deciding what I really wanted to do. I took a job as a junior lab technician in the department of diagnostic bacteriology at St Mary's hospital in Praed Street, London. While I was there, and following a discussion on the reduced life expectancy as a path lab technician, I picked up a magazine which advertised the dispensing course

'As a profession, we are now better regarded by our other optical colleagues than we were when I first qualified.'

at City College in Moorgate, I applied for it and haven't looked back since.

"After completing the course as a full time student I left City College and went into practice, working for a number small independents, in dispensing and managing roles over the years. I was very fortunate during my pre-reg year to work for a small company called Linwood Strong where I basically served an apprenticeship in how to dispense as it really should be done. That experience I feel is partly responsible for inspiring my love of dispensing and my drive to ensure a job well done. Whilst still working in practice I received an unexpected phone call from Mo Jalie

to say would I do some part time lectures for him at City College? I wasn't confident that I would be any good at it but Mo must have seen something in me that I hadn't yet identified. I taught part time at City, for three years, followed by three years full time when Henry Obstfeld left to go to City University. I learned a great deal by working alongside bright people like Mo Jalie, David Pipe, Linda Rapley and Elvin Montlake to name but a few, and it was there that I developed a close professional relationship and friendship with Jo Underwood who was one of my mentors.

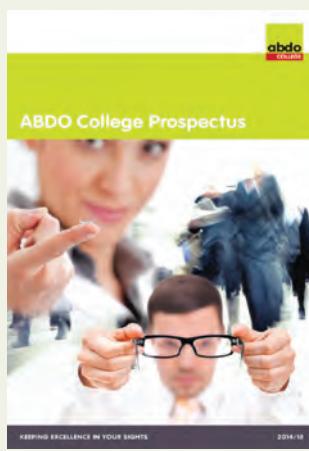
Whilst at City I took my Spectacle Lens Design honours exams and Cert Ed qualification. I was married shortly after completing the Cert Ed and left to live in France where my husband had been seconded for his job. We originally intended to stay for two years, but stayed for six. I was lucky to get to live a privileged ex-patriot life although it was a huge challenge at first: I had O level French, and Ian travelled extensively in his job leaving me solo in Paris a lot of the time, so I had to become very self-motivated. Eventually I plucked up the courage and booked myself in to an intensive French course whilst Ian was away travelling. After two weeks of total immersion, where no one spoke a word of English, my French took off,

## 2014/15 prospectus

ABDO College specialises in distance and blended learning education for the optical profession. It is the only college in the UK devoted solely to the teaching of ophthalmic dispensing and its related specialist areas.

Offering a range of courses including access, foundation degree, diploma, degree, advanced and honours, ABDO College provides quality programmes leading to ABDO examinations and qualifications.

To obtain a copy of the prospectus, please contact the Courses Team at ABDO College on 01227 738 829 (Option 1), or email [info@abdocollege.org.uk](mailto:info@abdocollege.org.uk).



my confidence increased and I felt I could do it."

Gillian had both of her children in France, but managed to fit in a lot else besides, both optical and non-optical. She says. "During that time I did some pre-exam revision in Singapore for ABDO. I was also asked to support an ABDO overseas student living in Paris and through her and her partner I ended up practising in France too – Shona has now become a lifelong friend. Hoping to be able to practice France I had applied for a job at Grand Optical where they required me to do a three hour exam in French! I passed the exam and was offered a job, but at that time there was no equivalent (reciprocal) qualification in France, so I would have been doing a qualified practitioner's job but for an unqualified person's pay. Needless to say I didn't accept the job, but was able to work in practice with Shona's partner, a qualified French optician, where I was able to hone my technical French. I was a distance learning course tutor for ABDO at that time and also continued as an ABDO practical examiner." Alongside this, Gillian says, "I managed to fit in tennis coaching. I was qualified as a coach in England and my French club asked me to coach there too." When her husband's secondment came to an end Gillian and family moved back to England. Although living in France was a great experience, she says, "I was delighted to come back to England so that I could meet up with my family and friends more regularly again. I had some excellent experiences in France but it could also be lonely living away from home."

Gillian's return to England coincided with Mo Jalie's retirement from City College, and Tony Botton, the new Head of Department, asked if she would like to do more teaching. She says, "I was delighted, and put my teaching hat back on for two days a week at City College and stayed there until ABDO College opened in 2001. I gave the first lecture on the first day – at what was The Pilgrim's Rest (now the Conningbrook Hotel) in Ashford, as the College building wasn't yet ready to be opened."

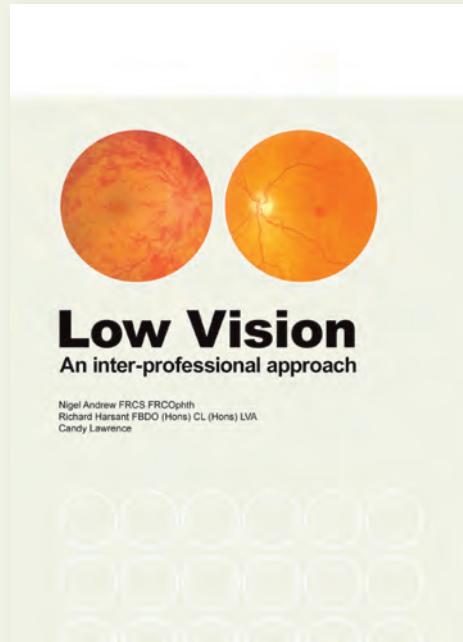
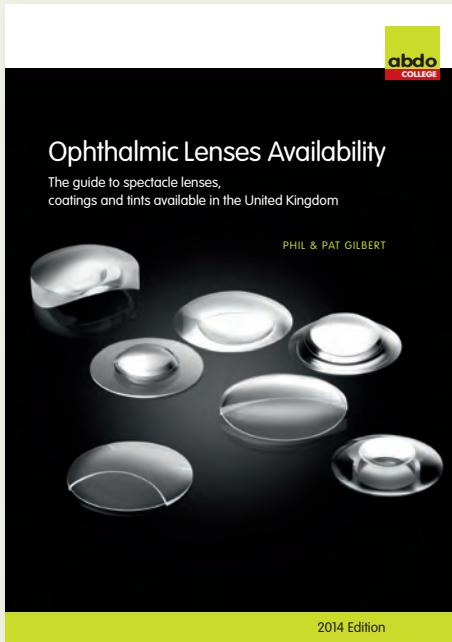
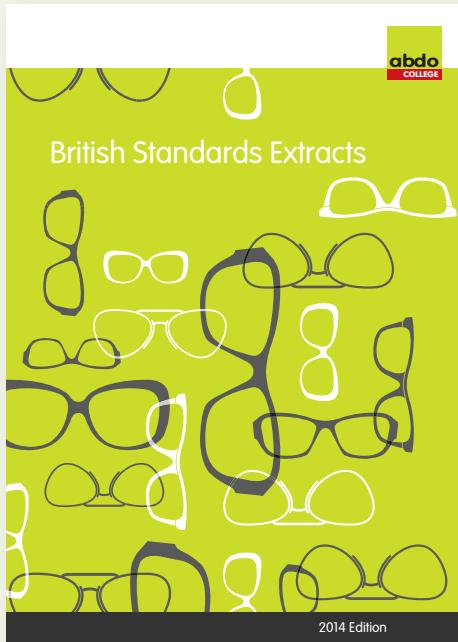
prepared to take their place within the healthcare professions rather than being an ancillary part. I think that dispensing optics has come of age, although the professionalism has always been there." Gillian has a clear vision for the future of optics. She says, "What excites me about the future is greater learning, higher qualifications and more responsibility. I'm excited too about progress in low vision. Family members are visually impaired, so I have a vested interest there. There are exciting things

**'What excites me about the future is greater learning, higher qualifications and more responsibility. I'm excited too about progress in low vision.'**

With so much experience, it is interesting to hear Gillian's views on how optics has changed. She says, "As a profession, we are now better regarded by our other optical colleagues than we were when I first qualified. We did a professional job but were considered by some as a second class partner. Now, we work in good partnership and are generally as highly regarded for our specialities as anyone else in the profession. The biggest change for the profession is that foundation degrees and degrees are now an available professional pathway option, which I feel has brought greater credibility to the role of the dispensing optician. There is always going to be debate over the modes of study by which a degree may be obtained, but now dispensing opticians are better

afoot, from new drugs to new lenses, to the possibility of retinal implants. Beyond low vision, I am interested in the question of whether dispensing opticians will be allowed to prescribe. This would take a huge shift and I'm not sure that the whole profession is willing to embrace that yet."

Gillian has her own ambitions for the future too. She says, "When I left college I said I'd never take another exam, yet I started the spectacle lens design course just before starting work at City College. I then did the LV honours course, I did the degree, and now I really think I'd quite like to do a masters', possibly in something specific to education or perhaps law, and I'm also interested in the low vision field. I love to learn, I love to read and will read anything, and I have a huge thirst for knowledge of any kind."



# New ABDO College publications for 2014

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